

Concord-Alewife Planning Study

Meeting Notes: November 12, 2003 Committee Meeting

Committee Members Present: Peg Callahan, Doug Brugge, Hom Sack, Al Wilson, Mitch Goldstein, Pat Amoroso, Peter White, Pat Goddard

City of Cambridge Staff: Iram Farooq, Susan Glazer, Susanne Rasmussen, Catherine Preston, Catherine Woodbury, Taha Jennings

Consultants: Ron Mallis, David Black

Welcome and Introduction

Susan Glazer presented the meeting's agenda, and informed those in attendance that the focus will be on traffic and transportation issues. She noted the connection between zoning and traffic and transportation, and how the former could be used to support the land use concepts the Committee has been discussing – including ensuring that traffic trip generation, would be an improvement over what would be allowed through current zoning. Handouts for the evening included the agenda, a preliminary draft of the proposed zoning, and copies of the traffic analyses.

Land Use/Zoning Update

Iram Farooq provided an overview of the zoning approach based on goals identified by the committee and informed by public meetings.

The approach includes incentives for positive change in the Study Area:

- Improving connections throughout the study area
- Creating open space
- Providing transportation improvements
- Enhancing the public realm and creating a vibrant, mixed use environment throughout the Study Area
- Supporting higher densities closer to transit station
- Ensuring that future development is more environmentally sensitive
- Encouraging housing throughout study area
- Supporting retail that is more neighborhood-focused

The approach must also consider broad citywide transportation and diversity goals. It also establishes base zoning that, if people were to develop as-of-right, would still produce positive results. Any development that exceeds what is allowed as-of-right could occur through a special permit process that includes public review and generates positive amenities, supports low-impact-development strategies and transportation improvements that are all consistent with the final plan. Iram also emphasized that traffic-related issues are one of several factors, including stormwater issues and urban design perspectives, when considering new zoning.

Presentation of Traffic and Transportation Analysis

David Black began the traffic and transportation analysis with a review of PM peak hour trip generation associated with existing development and with a projected 20-year build-

out under existing zoning. He then presented the first iteration of new trip generation projections based on the proposed land use scenario. David emphasized that the numbers refer only to trips generated in the study area and that whatever is done in the study area will not change the regional situation.

In looking at the 20 year projection, David pointed out that even if there is an increase in square footage greater than what is projected under current zoning, the increase in the proportion of housing (vs. commercial) under the new scenario would result in a smaller increase in traffic generation. In general, the proposed zoning contributes further to a less auto-dependent environment. It was also noted that the transportation model can change as new ideas or scenarios emerge from the committee.

Specific place-based transportation issues under analysis:

- Blanchard Road
 - *Pedestrian safety, noise and vibration, truck and by-pass traffic*
- Concord Avenue
 - *Un-signalized crossings, lack of sufficient pedestrian facilities*
- Shopping center
 - *Lack of pedestrian connections, operation of parking lot, vehicular circulation*
- Connections throughout the Study Area

Crossings between the Triangle and the Quadrangle were also discussed. David expressed concern about safety issues associated with an at-grade crossing. David also discussed a pedestrian-bicycle crossing and outlined the significant physical challenges posed by an above-grade vehicular crossing. Susanne Rasmussen mentioned that, at the moment, the MBTA is not eager to undertake a project such as a commuter rail stop but – as the area changes – it may be more possible.

Al Wilson's Plan for Alewife

Susan Glazer noted that Al Wilson had requested time to present his plans for the area to the committee at the previous committee meeting. Al outlined his plan, which included an at-grade crossing and a commuter rail stop. He expressed hope that the plan coming from this Study would not eliminate the possibility of either.

Committee Discussion

What interventions can be expected on Blanchard Road?

Reconstruction of Blanchard Road is expected to begin in July '04. City transportation staff are also looking at changes at the intersection of Blanchard Road and Grove Street. There will be an independent public process to discuss the details of the road reconstruction before the design is finalized.

Are there plans for a larger regional study?

There are no current plans for a major regional study or for major changes in regional transit. However, staff from the city work with many state and regional agencies on regional transit issues.

In connection with the special permit process, who normally gets notified to come to hearings?

Special Permit hearings notices are mailed to abutters and abutters to abutters within 300' of the development. Notice is also posted on the site.

There is a need to advocate for even more restrictions in the northwest portion of the Quadrangle, given its proximity to Highlands. The Highlands neighborhood will have a higher degree of comfort with office uses in that portion of the Quadrangle, rather than light industrial.

Current thinking behind the plan would allow the same types of uses that are currently allowed, but at a lower intensity. There is no desire to put currently conforming uses out of conformance, and therefore limiting peoples' ability to make even small changes. It was also noted that some currently non-conforming uses in the Quadrangle have been grandfathered in.

Do residential uses in the southwest part of the Quadrangle require special permits?

Residential uses are as-of-right in that part of the Quadrangle. However, buildings over 50,000 square feet everywhere in the city must obtain a project review special permit.

It's important to look at both local numbers and regional numbers to see what percentage of Concord-Alewife's problem is being addressed by this study. Also, this type of analysis leaves out qualitative issues and therefore doesn't encompass a range of other concerns that people have about traffic in the area.

The analysis at this point in the study is only one piece of a comprehensive look at traffic. It doesn't preclude the other sets of issues. The next iteration of the study should be specific about the fact that there are locally-generated numbers.

Absent regional considerations, there are only small differences in traffic.

The regional issue needs to be addressed in another venue.

Next Steps/Wrap Up

The next public meeting is scheduled for December 10, from 7:00PM - 9:30PM, at the Tobin School. The focus will be on the committee's progress, including the development of all aspects of the land use scenario, since the previous public meeting in June.

Public Comment:

There was continued discussion regarding a commuter rail stop and its impact on traffic, particularly the degree to which such a stop (as well as improved access to the T) would positively impact the amount of traffic generated (and projected to be generated) by the Quadrangle. Traffic/transportation studies also, it was felt; need to pay attention to the impact of schools and other institutions just outside the study area to this issue. The regional issue was also brought up by several members of the public, and the degree to which traffic will be felt along the side streets of nearby neighborhoods.